

She's Gone

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Summary

When they took on the Dark Elves together, Thor did it to save the world. Loki just wanted to avenge his mother. But even with the Dark Elves gone, his grief hasn't wavered.

He could go anywhere in the Nine Realms right now, but without his mother, it's meaningless. So he just returns to the dungeon, prepared to spend the rest of his life in misery. He certainly doesn't deserve better.

Then Odin finds him.

In the silence of the dungeon, Loki hears the footsteps long before they approach. In the back of his mind, he wonders whom they belong to. A guard, most likely, probably coming to look over the wreckage after the jailbreak that set nearly every prisoner free. He's going to find a lot more than he bargained for.

The footsteps come to a halt in front of Loki's cell. He doesn't look up, instead resting his forehead atop his knees, legs pulled up against his chest. Maybe he'll be lucky and the guard will leave him alone.

Then he hears his name.

And it's not a guard who says it.

It's someone far, far worse.

Loki squeezes his eyes shut, but otherwise, he doesn't move. He's not naive enough to think his silence will earn him some privacy, but right now, he has nothing to say.

"You came back." It's a statement of fact, but more than that, it's a statement of suspicion. He supposes he deserves that.

Still, he says nothing.

"Why?"

Loki heaves a sigh, long and heavy, and finally, he lifts his head. Odin stands before him, just outside the bounds of his powered-down cell. His expression is unreadable, his emotions carefully hidden from view. They usually are, Loki's noticed. The only emotions he ever sees from his supposed 'father' are anger and disappointment.

"You could have escaped," Odin continues. "You could have gone anywhere in the universe, and you came back here. Why?"

Loki shakes his head helplessly. "Where have I to go?" His voice is barely a whisper. He doesn't trust himself to speak any louder.

"I would assume anywhere is better than prison," Odin says. He does nothing to conceal his distrust.

Loki just shakes his head to himself and rests his head atop his knees again, gaze turned downward to the floor.

There's a long stretch of silence, and he almost begins to wonder if he's finally been left alone; if Odin managed to slip away without him noticing. It would be nice if it were true. He has nothing to say to his so-called father. He just wants to be left alone.

Then Odin speaks again. "Where is Thor?"

"I don't know," Loki mumbles. "Midgard, I assume."

"And you're not with him."

"No, I'm not."

Again, it grows silent. He still has the slightest glimmer of hope that Odin will leave him alone, but the longer he stays, the less likely it seems.

"Do you take me for a fool, Loki?"

Loki just sighs.

"You had a chance to be free, yet you returned to an empty, unguarded cell," Odin says.

"What is your plan? What havoc will you bring now?"

Loki doesn't respond. Why should he? The Loki that Odin's talking to is gone. That drive for chaos has burnt out. He's all but resigned himself to a life of nothingness, whether Odin believes him or not.

"*Loki*." He's louder this time, less patient — and he wasn't very patient to begin with.

Loki doesn't care.

"She's gone," he says quietly. "You can kill me now. She can't stop you."

There's no answer at first. A part of him hopes that's because he's going to follow through. The longer the silence stretches on, the less he believes it. Perhaps it was too much to ask that he be given that luxury.

"Is that what this is about?" Odin asks finally. There's a sense of... compassion, it seems, in his voice. That's something he hasn't heard from him in a very long time. "Frigga?"

Loki doesn't respond. He doesn't have to; the answer's obvious. He just lost the most important person in his life – the *only* person in his life, really; certainly the only person who wanted to be in it. What's left for him now that she's dead?

This time, it's Odin who sighs, and Loki rather reluctantly lifts his gaze to find his father taking a seat in front of him. In any other situation, he'd be baffled. The King of Asgard doesn't sit on the floor – certainly not the disgusting, dirty floor of the dungeon. And yet, he is.

"Did she suffer?" Loki asks him.

Odin shakes his head. "It was quick," he says. "She was very brave."

Loki forces the smallest of smiles. That's nice to hear. It doesn't make the pain go away, this hollow feeling in his chest, but it's nice nonetheless.

"Were you there?" he asks softly.

Odin shakes his head. "Only after it was done."

"Was Thor?" Loki asks. "Did she die alone?"

"She wasn't alone," Odin assures him.

Loki just nods. She wouldn't have deserved to die alone. She didn't deserve to die at all. And if he hadn't told that monster where to find her, maybe she wouldn't have. Maybe she would still be here. Maybe he would be talking to her, not Odin, and she would give him a hug and tell him how proud she is of what he did.

But she can't do that.

Because she's dead.

He squeezes his eyes shut, but not before a single tear escapes. He rests his forearms atop his knees and buries his head in them in a vain attempt to hide his tears, but it's only a matter of time before they turn to wracked sobs. He doesn't have the energy to be embarrassed. It hardly matters what Odin thinks of him. It's certainly not possible for him to think any less of him than he already does.

Then there's a hand on his back.

He lifts his head just enough to look. Odin's seated next to him now, and though it may just be a trick of the light, it almost seems as though there are tears in his eyes, too.

"I never got to say goodbye," Loki whispers. He was so *mean* to her, all those times she snuck down into his cell. The last thing he ever said to her was that she wasn't his mother. She died thinking that he didn't see her as his mother.

Odin wraps his arms around him, and for a moment, Loki tenses. It takes a few seconds for him to really process that Odin is trying to hug him. Odin is *hugging* him. Never in his wildest dreams would he have thought this was even a possibility, and yet, here they are. He doesn't know what to think.

"I'm sorry," Odin says quietly.

Loki's breath catches in his throat.

He just...

He said...

He apologized.

He really apologized.

And just like that, Loki falls apart. He buries his face in his father's chest, sobbing loudly and gracelessly, and all Odin does is hold him tighter. And, for the first time in a very, very long time, he feels safe. He's here with his father – his *real* father; the only father who ever truly

mattered to him. And maybe he didn't always see that, and maybe he had a good reason to lose sight of it, but right now, as he sobs in Odin's arms, he truly feels as though he's home.

Odin rubs his back gently, holding him close as he sobs. He feels like a child again. Those were simpler times. He would give anything to go back to them. He would give anything to go back to when they were a family.

"It's my fault," Loki chokes out. Odin needs to know that. He deserves to. He deserves to know what he's forgiving his son for. His crimes go far beyond what his people have already heard.

"No, Loki," Odin says quietly. "It's not your fault."

"Yes, it is!" he insists. It *is* his fault, and that's something he will never be able to unknow. "I told them where to find her. She would still be alive if I never..."

Odin's quiet after that. Of course he is. The fact that he didn't shove Loki away the moment he heard those words shows great self-restraint. The Allmother is dead, and the only person to blame is the one he's holding in his arms.

"Did you know?" Odin asks finally.

"Hmm?"

"Did you know that he would find her there?" Odin asks. "Did you know what he would do?"

Loki snuffles softly. "Well..."

"Did you?"

Loki hesitates, but ultimately, he shakes his head, a small movement against his father's chest. "I didn't." *I thought he'd find you.* He thought Malekith would find Odin. He'd thought Malekith would finally put an end to the person who'd ruined his life. He never would have imagined that it would be Frigga in his place. He never would have done it if he'd known...

"Then it's not your fault," Odin says simply.

"But—"

"We've all made mistakes, my son," Odin says. "In my grief, I nearly allowed the Nine Realms to be plunged into eternal darkness. Your mother would only have been the first of many casualties if you and your brother hadn't interfered, and for that, Asgard is in your debt."

It's a touching sentiment. These truly may be the kindest words he's ever spoken to him — certainly the kindest words he's heard in years. And yet, it means nothing to him. It's the validation he'd craved for centuries, the validation he'd driven himself mad trying to earn, and it means *nothing*.

This wasn't his plan. He deserves no credit for it.

He never intended to save the Nine Realms. He simply wanted to avenge his mother.

Thor and Malekith took the fight to Midgard. Loki faked his death and tried to plot his escape instead.

He did *nothing* right. He doesn't deserve any praise for his actions. Everything he did was selfish. He wasn't trying to save anybody. He wasn't trying to keep Asgard alive or to make the Nine Realms a better place. All he wanted was to avenge his mother, to right his wrongs, and he couldn't even do that.

"I love you, my son," Odin says softly. "You were never just a stolen relic, or some tool I planned to use as leverage against Jotunheim. The day I brought you home, I knew that my family was finally complete, and one of my deepest regrets will always be that I didn't tell you that enough."

Loki turns his head, resting his cheek against his father's chest so he can wipe the tears from his eyes. "You don't have to lie to me." It's not his father's fault that his life is falling apart around him. It's the consequences of his own actions, and he deserves every piece of what's coming to him.

"I mean every word," Odin says.

Loki would love more than anything to believe that, but he doesn't. He can't. He doesn't deserve to.

Odin lets out a long breath, and he gently strokes his fingers through his son's hair. "Come," he says quietly. "You must be tired. Let me take you to your room."

Your room, he says. He wants to bring Loki to his chambers – his chambers that he hasn't seen in years. A part of him is almost surprised that they still exist within the palace. But Odin's not doing this because he truly believes that Loki's tired. Not really; not entirely. It's not about his chambers at all; it's about the freedom they represent.

This is the end to his sentence.

He's free.

But Loki sighs and shakes his head. He can't go back there. Not right now. Not when he knows he'll be left alone with his thoughts for hours on end. It's been torture for however long it's been since he returned to the dungeon of his own devices, and it will only grow worse if he returns to the room he grew up in. He has too many memories there of a time he'll never get back.

"Loki..." Odin says quietly. He sounds disappointed – truly, genuinely disappointed. He *wants* Loki to go with him. He *wants* Loki to come out of the dungeon.

Loki lets out a long breath, and as he wipes the tears from his cheeks once more, he sits back so he can see his father. "I suppose I wouldn't be opposed to having something to eat." The

food in the dungeon is nothing short of an atrocity; an insult to Asgard as a realm. The idea of a *real* meal truly could not sound more appealing.

Odin smiles at that. “Then come,” he says. “Let us find you something to eat.”

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